

Approved 12/06/07

AMHERST FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Meeting of November 13, 2007

CALL TO ORDER

The Finance Committee meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. on Nov. 13, 2007, in the large activity room at the Bangs Community Center.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Marilyn Blaustein, Paul Bobrowski, Alice Carlozzi, Kay Moran (Vice-Chair), Brian Morton (Chair), Douglas Slaughter and Andrew Steinberg.

STAFF AND OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

John Musante, Finance Director/Treasurer; Adrienne Terrizzi, Alan Root, Clare Bertrand.

AGENDA

1. Public Hearing on FY 09 Draft Preliminary Budget Guidelines
2. Public Comment on Draft Financial Management Policies and Objectives
3. Town Meeting Articles Awaiting FC action
4. Minutes
5. Next Meeting and Agenda
6. Miscellaneous

ACTION

The Committee voted 7-0 to ADOPT the Preliminary Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Guidelines with the discussed minor modifications to be made by the Chair and Vice-Chair.

The Committee voted 7-0 to RECOMMEND REFERRING to the Planning Board Article 18 on the warrant for the Nov. 5, 2007, Special Town Meeting.

The Committee voted 7-0 to RECOMMEND REFERRING to the Planning Board Article 19 on the warrant for the Nov. 5, 2007, Special Town Meeting.

DISCUSSION

1 and 2. Public Hearing on FY 09 Draft Preliminary Budget Guidelines and Public Comment on Draft Financial Management Policies and Objectives

Terrizzi thanked the Finance Committee for seeking input on the guidelines and for our work in general to provide advice that helps ensure a financially sound town. She asked how the alarming projected deficit of \$9.3 million in FY 13 might be avoided. Musante and others said that projection assumed we keep all existing services and that there's no additional revenue from economic development or the state or other entities. In reality, the town has to vote balanced budgets each year, and active efforts are underway to develop additional revenue. Slaughter added that the long-term process may take several years to produce results. Committee members agreed that draft language about this deficit should be modified to emphasize it would result only from doing nothing.

Root said he sees no long-term financial solutions coming from the state, and that we need fresh ideas about how to survive as a town beyond five years. Some of his ideas are seeking more assistance from UMass, Amherst and Hampshire colleges with public education, doing more with distance learning, involving family members more with educating their children. He will put these and other ideas in writing for us. He agreed with Steinberg's suggestion that we explore regionalizing more services.

Bertrand thanked the Finance Committee for holding this hearing to seek the public's opinion. She asked whether we'd consider fee increases. Musante said many fees were increased recently, but that fee levels are reexamined each year. Morton noted that fees may be increased only by enough to cover the services they pay for. Bertrand also said that she thinks it is not our purview to divide the budget "pie" among the separate budget categories. Morton and others agreed it's a political decision the non-elected Finance Committee shouldn't be making. Moran said no other board or forum has made such suggestions, that the Town Government Act leaves it up to Town Meeting to decide budget allocations. Moran emphasized that we are seeking input for these draft, preliminary guidelines which can and probably will change. Carlozzi said in the past the Select Board, School Committee, Library Trustees and Finance Committee have met to decide how to allocate the overall budget. Morton said the Budget Coordinating Group, with representatives from all four boards, could serve that function but "isn't quite there yet." Bertrand said it shouldn't be called "the Finance Committee's budget" when it's presented to Town Meeting. Carlozzi said the Town Government Act directs us to present the overall budget to Town Meeting, and that we try to write our report and get it into Town Meeting members' hands two weekends before Annual Town Meeting starts, which is sometimes very difficult due to last-minute changes proposed by budget-makers. Bobrowski said our function is to advise and provide information. To do that, we spend weeks hearing from department heads and others, to provide Town Meeting with the best possible advice. If Town Meeting doesn't take it, that's OK.

Committee members agreed with Musante's suggestion that the percentage guidelines be included at the beginning of the document.

3. Town Meeting Articles Awaiting Finance Committee Action.

Musante said the Planning Board is holding a public hearing tomorrow on Article 14 on the Nov. 5 Special Town Meeting warrant and on Article 1 of the newly called Nov. 28 Special Town Meeting, which is reportedly a compromise between petitioners' Article 14 and the Planning Board's Article 13. Planning Director Jonathan Tucker will come to the Finance Committee's 6:30 p.m. meeting Nov. 15 to explain it to us.

The Planning Board has issued its report on Article 18 on the Nov. 5 Special Town Meeting warrant and recommends referring it back to the Planning Board. The Finance Committee voted to support referral.

Carlozzi noted a comment by the Planning Board that petition Article 19 had been developed and put on the warrant without the full public participation process zoning bylaw amendments usually get. She proposed recommending referral to the Planning Board, and the committee agreed.

Morton said petitioners sponsoring Article 17 did not come to our last meeting when they were on the agenda and couldn't come to this one. Steinberg noted that we've already voted to recommend Article 16, which concerns the same area. At Morton's

request, town staff members are seeking to compare potential property tax revenue differences between the two proposed zoning changes.

4. Minutes. None were available.

5. Next meeting and agenda.

The next meeting will be Thursday, Nov. 15 at 6:30 p.m. in the Band Room at Amherst Regional Middle School. We will discuss Town Meeting warrant articles.

ADJURNMENT

The Finance Committee meeting adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

Submitted by Kay Moran, Acting Clerk